

Enacting Senate Bill 310 California's School-Based, Sun-Protective Hats & Clothing Legislation

Senate Bill (SB) 310 took effect on January 1, 2002, throughout California. This legislation requires school sites to allow students to wear sun-protective hats and other clothing when they are outdoors on campus. The school site retains authority to determine which styles and colors of clothing can be worn.

The California-based William S. Graham Foundation for Melanoma Research, Inc. (generally known as the "Billy" Foundation) spearheaded the drive to develop and enact SB 310. This two-year effort was partially prompted by repeated calls to the Foundation by frustrated parents whose children were prevented from wearing hats at school to shield their heads and faces from harmful solar rays. (Many California school districts prohibited hats on campus due to concerns related to gang-affiliation and sloppy attire.)

As Karen L. Graham, Founder and President of the Billy Foundation, began to ponder the need for school-focused sun safety legislation, she happened to sit by the daughter of State Senator Don Perata on an airplane flight. As the two conversed, inevitably Mrs. Graham shared her Foundation's mission for fighting the dreaded disease, melanoma. As the discussion moved toward the need for sun-safety legislation, the legislator's daughter encouraged Mrs. Graham to contact her father's office.

Following is a brief description of how SB 310 was formulated and enacted from this point:

- Mrs. Graham and several Foundation board members met with Senator Perata's health liaison at a field office and discussed the seriousness of melanoma and the Foundation's desire to see sun-safety legislation enacted for schools. The liaison proved quite encouraging and presented Mrs. Graham with written instructions (entitled, "Legislation Proposal Form") on how and what to prepare before meeting with the senator's assistants.
- The Billy Foundation sought out other organizations and individuals who were working to fight skin cancer to commit their support for developing and promoting enactment of school-based sun safety legislation. These collaborators contributed advice, letters of support, and scientific literature to assist this concept and effort.
- During an eight-month period, a 600-page compendium was prepared for Senator Perata's office that strategically detailed the justification for creating and passing sun-safety legislation applicable to school campuses. The package included journal articles, statistics, parent letters, case studies of similar efforts conducted overseas, and expert testimony from top researchers both within and outside the United States.
- The compendium was completed and sent to Senator Parata's field office at nearly the end of that year's legislative session. The proposal was forwarded to the capitol office (Sacramento) but there was no time for staff to act on it. The next legislative session was not to begin until almost four months later. Thus, the momentum diminished a bit.

- Representatives did not respond to the Billy Foundation early on during the first weeks of the next legislative session. At that time, Mrs. Graham happened to be visiting the lobbyist for the California Society of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery in Sacramento on an unrelated matter when she inadvertently related the stalled status of the school sun safety proposal. The lobbyist encouraged Mrs. Graham to call Senator Perata's office to determine if she could schedule a meeting that very day. She was successful in making an immediate appointment and directly went to the senator's office. Senator Perata, by chance, walked through the room where Mrs. Graham was seated and Mrs. Graham seized the opportunity to pitch her proposal to him. (It was discovered that Senator Perata had previously lost a family member to melanoma.)
- Senator Perata agreed in concept to sponsor a sun-safety bill. Based on analysis of the 600-page packet and input from the Billy Foundation's Medical Advisory Board, it was determined that the proposed legislation should require minimal sun protection measures – (merely allowing students to wear sun safety hats and other clothes). Justification for this gentle approach was based on several considerations: 1) No state in North America had previously enacted skin cancer prevention legislation targeting schools. 2) California schools would balk at comprehensive sun-protection regulations at a time when they were under intense pressure to implement new teaching standards and greatly improve student scholastic achievement. 3) One of the main purposes of this effort was to simply place sun-safety on the radar screen for school administrators. Success in this endeavor would provide a stepping-stone for future efforts.
- Senator Perata's office took the source material supplied in the original packet and created the actual bill language (in cooperation with legal/fiscal committees etc.). Though the proposed legislation addressed both health and education (schools), it was determined that it would be written as an amendment to the existing education code.
- Once the legislation received an actual bill number, all identified collaborators were asked to re-send a letter specifically supporting SB 310. (Note: For such legislative efforts, it is imperative to enlist the cooperation of many organizations such as the local (state) chapter of: The American Cancer Society; dermatology society; medical association(s); oncology nursing; cancer foundations; major cancer treatment centers; the Association for Physical Activity, Recreation, and Dance; as well as renowned melanoma researchers from around the world. Remember to secure the reports of noted international research experts regarding existing sun-safety interventions.)
- The only organization that opposed SB 310 was the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) that viewed the proposed requirements as unnecessary in the face of education reform mandates they were already seeking to implement. The ACSA wrote a letter opposing SB 310 but the organization never provided formal testimony at any hearing.

- Finally, the Billy Foundation assembled potential speakers to testify at both the Senate and Assembly education hearings. Included were dermatologists, teachers, public health professionals, melanoma patients, and family members of melanoma victims. The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) provided background information used to help frame the issue for maximum impact. The CDHS-supplied fact that made the greatest impression on legislators was the federal government's recent (spring 2000) classification of solar radiation as a “known human carcinogen.” (Note: To increase the sense of presence and gravity of proposed legislation, at least ten individuals should form a line to the microphone at education hearings, even if it is known that there is only time for two to four speakers.)
- At every public hearing, Mrs. Graham came prepared with “speaking points” ready to share with reporters. (It is vital to obtain the ear of the press to highlight your issue. A public relations firm can provide great assistance in this area. Make sure the sponsoring legislator comes out and makes a statement to the media after a hearing to thus attach a face to the topic.)
- Governor Davis signed SB 310 on October 8, 2001. It went into effect on January 1, 2002. Mrs. Graham advises that while many organizations must combine their efforts to enact such legislation, the visible lead agency should be well known and highly respected in its home state. The principal leader(s) must be able to pull together various players to harmoniously support the desired legislation.

Karen Graham and the Billy Foundation are happy to assist skin cancer colleagues in other states and share their insights and tips regarding the steps for preparing and advocating sun-safety legislation targeting school venues. Interested individuals may contact the Billy Foundation at (888) 882-4559 or via E-mail at zebra@bfmelanoma.com. The Foundation's web address is www.bfmelanoma.com.